12: Crocombe OJ23 Orokaiva OJ23

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[For information on birthday parties, see Category 561.]

777 this lineage was the village constable. Though the records are by no means satisfactory, it is clear that between 1955 and 1963, virtually the whole of the Jegese clan became baptised while in 1963--but only then--the majority of the Seho clan became Christian. The time lag between the clans was not insignificant, as the head of the Seho clan, who refused to be baptised, died in 1963, and it was after his death that the new leader, his son, joined the Church, together with his clansmen. It would be wrong, however, to suggest that it was only the death of the old leader which delayed conversion, because the records for the Sasembata district as a whole show 1962 and 1963 as the years that Christianity became the dominant religion in these villages. Before 1963, the pattern seems to have been similar to the present one in Inonda: one clan or faction was baptised, while the [191] other held out. It was told that it was the old men with a reputation for black magic who felt most disinclined to abandon Paganism, as they feared it would harm their powers.

731 I shall delay a general discussion on the Church until a later
777 Chapter and confine myself here to a discussion of the impact on community organisation. Undoubtedly, the eruption accelerated the development of some of the Anglican mission stations. While before 1951, the mission in that district was centralised in Sangara, the new centre was in Popondetta, well away from the populous area around the mountain. The major station still operating in the Mount Lamington area was the one at Wasata. In 1951, major stations were established at Sasembata, Agenahambo and Irihambo, while the Hohorita and Isivita stations which followed later completed the coverage. One impetus to the support given to the Sasembata station by the people was undoubtedly the active programme of the church during the evacuation period, when there were daily church services as well as church participation in the education and health field.

871 One feature that became established during the evacuation period
731 was regular schooling for the young. The extent to which the people
177 recognised this as a momentous change in community life is shown by a ritual introduced about that time and still observed at the present. In 1967, the head teacher announced that school would start on a Thursday but no pupils came. The people told him the children were not [852] ready." The following Sunday, all the children--and only the children--gathered for a "feast"--a common evening meal at which they were obsequiously served by the adults. This was a feast to farewell them, I was told, for the next day they would go away to the school. The measured distance between the village ground and the school ground was six chains. The children were home every night and every lunch hour. Nonetheless, in a more essential sense they were leaving the village to submit to the influence of strangers.

794 When Sasembata station was reopened in 1951, no community organisation was associated with the church so that the mission teachers had to make contact with villages for any work they wanted done and this was arranged on an ad-hoc basis. Nowadays, there are two forms of

654 731 After resettlement in Awala and other villages, the government made no attempt to discourage the resettled people from making contact with other villages, as long as they did not begin to reside within the area that was still restricted in May, 1951.

Section 3: Morale of the Relocated Community

731 823 In earlier chapters, I have already drawn attention to the widespread homesickness of the evacuees and their insistence upon maintaining identification with the homeland. Undoubtedly, separation from this land compels the Orokaiva to abandon many of his customs and traditions of the past, because so many of these customs and traditions [852] arise out of association with the land. To give only one example, a ceremony thought to be necessary for the survival of a new-born child is, even now, performed in a family garden. Separation from the family [794] land makes such a ritual impossible. At Ilimo, traditional rituals were replaced to some extent by the unaccustomed frequency of Christian religious services which were always well-attended. This, however, was at no time accepted as a substitute for the old way of life.

731 177 Naturally, in the circumstances, people did not feel any pride or satisfaction in their situation in the evacuation camps. Once they were resettled in new villages on their own land, they felt pride in the new villages and in the "new way of life" they had adopted. Sivepo [438] was proud, for instance, of having discarded its pigs. On one occasion [628] they were bargaining to buy a pig from neighbouring Carombi which still had its pigs. During the bargaining, a Carombi man taunted Sivepo about its lack of this kind of treasure. The Sivepo people haughtily called off the sale. Such pride and interest in innovation was associated with a sense of security regarding land tenure and Sivepo's status in relation to other villages. If Sivepo had not felt secure in its ideology of the "new way," there would have been dismay at Carombi's taunt about the lack of pigs. But nobody in Sivepo doubted the rightness of the choice that had been made.

CHAPTER IX: Adherence to Tradition

Section 1: Conflicts Between Two Conceptual Systems

181 The Orokaiva of today has to act in conformity with two
177 conceptual systems, one attributed to the ancestors and the other imposed by the mission and, to some extent, by the government. Essentially the system followed today is that attributed to the ancestors, but changes have been very numerous. These changes have mostly been conceptualised as substitutions and additions of the old system, leaving its essentials intact. At the same time, these substitutions have been calculated to ward off criticism from mission and government, and to cope with changed conditions.

551 There is, for instance, a taboo on using the names of affines.
178 When the government pressed for the amalgamation of villages, affines frequently found themselves residents of the same village, which made the name taboo very awkward. The custom now is that the taboo is greatly relaxed for Christians; the baptismal name has only a mild taboo attached to it, while the severe taboo on the Orokaiva name bestowed at birth has remained unchanged. In dealings with Europeans, who do not respect the taboo (even though affines of a person are present), only the baptismal name is used. In the village, the Orokaiva names are now heard very rarely indeed.

464 The temporary labour migration of young men (who sometimes
167 leave wives behind in the village) continues a traditional pattern of
178 behaviour as young men used to go out in the same circumstances to hunt heads, but it is money they now bring back before they settle down. Bridewealth gifts have remained conceptually as they were before: there must be a pig or pigs, bark cloth, ritual valuables
178 such as shell necklaces and feathers, cooking pots, but in addition
583 new wealth is necessary: store clothes, "knives and forks" (i.e., kitchenware) and money. Here again, a change in detail has not changed the basic conception of the gift but rather has updated the details.

852 There used to be a ceremony to which a boy was subjected at
178 or just before adolescence. This was the time when the boy formally assumed clothing. The boy used to be given his perineal band (bo) by some adult male cognate, often the man by whom the boy had been named. (Williams, 1930: 98) Nowadays, boys wear clothing much earlier in life, but the ceremony is still held as an occasion for honouring the child. It is now called a "birthday party"; as such it has the blessing of the mission while at the same time an essential part of a boy's life cycle is preserved.

121 Much depends on the success of the policies now being advocated by the government. If these are successful in raising living standards and hold promise of yielding the wealth and power expected of them (that is, a gradual increase of wealth and power), then the direction of change observed since the war will continue to be followed. People will then be willing to make ever more drastic modifications of old ritual and finally, perhaps, the traditional conceptual system will break down in favour of a different system. On the other hand, Orokaiva are not unprepared if these promises remain unfulfilled and if living standards should actually drop again, a possibility by no means to be ruled out as the economic future of New Guinea export products is very uncertain. In that case, millennial movements, relying on traditional magical procedures, are an ever-open possibility.

179 At the present time, Orokaiva are not taking a defensive position about their abandonment of old customs, as they regard this a reasonable consequence of accepting the "new day." Nor do they act defensively when they observe traditional custom. They reinterpret such observance by means of the kind of ambiguities I have outlined.

[154] In fact I cannot conceive of any situation in which an Orokaiva will behave defensively. I would not call their ambiguities rationalisations either: when they use terms like "birthday party" or "practise," they are not rationalising their ceremonies as part of a new Christian way of life but they are merely saying that these ceremonies are capable of bearing a second meaning, in the context of a Christian system. Upon further inquiry, the anthropologist finds that his informants can explain the original system in much detail whereas a concept such as that of a "birthday party" in the Western sense is left in a total vacuum, as the day and even the year of birth of a child is hardly noted.

Section 2: Controls Operating for and Against Continuance of Tradition

852 In an earlier chapter I described a ceremony for children
177 about to start their new school year. It was a kind of farewell feast, which certainly made the children feel that they were off on an important assignment to an alien world. But it also carried a second kind of message: that the world of the school begins outside the
859 village boundaries. When the children came back to the village (which
179 was every night) they resumed their ordinary roles in the Orokaiva scheme. The children felt no conflict of loyalties inside the village; village life had been sufficiently adapted to remove glaring inconsistencies between the rules of village and mission station. It was a little
124 different for my interpreter who had been to Martyr's School and who
177 therefore knew various Christian concepts unfamiliar to other villagers. This made him feel a little superior when he talked to me; he would tell me what "the others" believed, adding that he knew how matters